

Dinkey Collaborative – Full Collaborative Meeting SUMMARY – March 17, 2011

Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project, Sierra National Forest

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1. Opening Remarks

Facilitator Dorian Fougères reviewed the agenda and ground rules for the meeting. Mosé Jones-Yellin, Project Manager, Sierra National Forest (SNF), welcomed all participants to the meeting. Collaborative members and staff introduced themselves.

2. Landscape Evaluation Part 1: Guiding Principles

Goal: Familiarize members with the evaluation exercise and agree upon criteria for selecting near-term opportunities for management activities.

Facilitator Mr. Fougères reviewed the goal for the agenda item. Collaborative members were provided with a handout titled “Dinkey Strategy Brief #1: Landscape-Level Assessment and Evaluation (dated 3.09.11)” which was drafted by the facilitators. The intention of the document was to establish a framework for the Collaborative to structure near term activities, and to maximize opportunities for contribution. Mr. Fougères explained the approach is for near-term project selection (for the next six, nine to twelve months) and not to craft long standing policy. The objective was to identify lower conflict areas that the group could agree upon in the near-term.

The group first read and discussed the approach outline at their table groups and reported out on the following two questions:

- **What do you think about this approach as a whole?**

➤ **How would you amend or clarify the criteria?**

Each table group reported out on their discussion, highlights included:

- Change the title of the document to “Criteria for Identifying Potential Projects Through 2013” to ensure it is clear the approach is for the near term.
- Identify areas that have potential to be high quality habitat for wildlife and the need for criteria around high and low quality habitat.
 - Add evaluation criteria on watershed, meadow, riparian habitat.
 - Add aquatic and plant species.
 - Focus on the spotted owl species.
 - Need to clarify what restoration in species composition means and if it is going back to historical species composition.
- Do not emphasize biomass while there is a lack of infrastructure for receiving such material for processing.
 - Consider biomass as a long term goal and instead emphasize small diameter trees in the near term.
- Identify places that have a high potential for snag recruitment and fire.
- Identify areas with high potential for road decommission.
- Add cultural uses of the land and research as opportunities.
- Add economic considerations and what projects would do the most good for the lowest costs.

The group agreed that the library should be more than a handful of policy documents. No single document is perfect. The Collaborative should work together to compile the library on guiding documents. Different documents will have different strengths, and members interested in technical issues will have to be familiar with the range of them.

- **ACTION ITEM:** Collaborative members should forward documents to be included.

3. Landscape Evaluation Part 2: Foundational Information

Goal: Provide starting point for characterizing the different areas of the landscape, priority needs, and restoration opportunities.

Mr. Fougères explained that Forest Service (SF) staff members agreed to provide presentations on the following topics today as well as subsequent topics at the next meeting. The goal of the presentations was to provide the Collaborative with landscape level information on the following topics, the priority needs from staff’s view point, and the opportunities for restoration. The hope was that with this information, the Collaborative can then move into a more detailed conversation around where and what projects they might want to pursue. Mr. Fougères noted this is only the first time this information will be discussed and not the last.

- Archaeological Resources
- Fire History

- Fuels
- Roads
- Botany
- Range Management

Mr. Fougères asked the group to focus on the following questions.

- **Questions of clarification**
- **What additional information would you like?**

The notes below provide brief summaries of the presentations. The powerpoint files and corresponding handouts were distributed to members during the meeting and electronic copies were distributed thereafter.

A. Archeological Resources Presentation by Steve Marsh

Mr. Marsh began by explaining that the FS relies heavily on stakeholders, such as Native Americans, to understand historical land uses and cultural resources. The FS archeological staff also looks to identify places and sites with physical evidence of previous uses. He explained there is federal legislation guiding the management of such sites and resources, such as the National Historical Preservation Act. The Dinkey Creek Bridge is the only nationally registered historical place within the Dinkey landscape. Mr. Marsh explained FS staff study and consider the historical use of the landscape to identify themes of use such as mining, grazing, hydroelectric, and recreation. Key to identifying historical sites and uses is to walk the grounds, surveying people and research. Mr. Marsh showed a map explaining the areas where he and his team have been able to study the land, and the areas of need and unknown. Unknown areas would be the priority for archeological projects. He outlined the opportunities, explaining that as the nature of this work requires collaboration there is a need to design a process to survey and manage unknown areas together.

Discussion:

Susan Britting, Sierra Forest Legacy, asked about the amount of information on contemporary cultural information. Mr. Jones-Yellin mentioned that he made a presentation to the Cold Springs Rancheria Tribal Council and that the Tribe was concerned with specific sites and very interested on engaging with the FS on this topic. Unfortunately they could not attend today's meeting, but they are interested in making a presentation on cultural resources to the Collaborative at a later date.

Rich Bagley (via written notes) asked what treatments are acceptable and unacceptable within the various sites.

B. Fire History Presentation by Carolyn Ballard

Ms. Ballard explained within the Dinkey landscape the FS has generated a fire history by decade. She reviewed a summary of the Tree Ring Study as well as a map used to show the known fire

history for each decade. The goals of these fire studies were to determine where fires have occurred across the landscape and how they helped the forest mature. The studies inventory return intervals, elevations, and tree species.

Discussion:

Ms. Britting asked how the FS defines medium and large fires in terms of the amount of acreage affected. Ms. Ballard explained that it varies depending on when the fire happened, historically a large fire could be 400-500 acres. However with the recent expansion of fire fighting responses, the FS would consider a couple 100 acres to be a large fire. A small fire would be about 10 acres.

Chad Hanson, John Muir Project, asked if they found as fires move up in elevation that their intensity increased. He mentioned there are many studies on high intensity fires. Mr. Jones-Yellin responded that they can follow up to provide more clarity around complexity and multitude of fires. Ms. Ballard mentioned that a complex fire can be both high or low intensity.

Mr. Bagley (via written notes) asked what challenges the FS has in meeting expectations and directions of the Collaborative. He also asked what limited expectations the FS wants to consider as the Collaborative develops burn projects.

C. Fuels Presentation by Carolyn Ballard

Ms. Ballard displays a map showing where distinct changes to the vegetation occur on the Dinkey landscape, thus changing the fire risk and fuel composition. She explained how the FS manages for different land zones, and how management varies for areas with structures and public safety concerns. She also explained where areas with under burns exist on the Dinkey landscape, and some opportunities for Collaborative projects within the landscape. She outlined the opportunities such as returning fires as a natural disturbance process and using fire to maintain conditions in the Sierra mixed conifer and red fir forests. She explained the needs are for hazardous fuel removal, public safety, and treatment in low elevation pine forests with high fuel loading outside of public safety areas.

Discussion:

Stan Van Velsor, The Wilderness Society, asked if most of the prescribed burns are associated with thinning projects or prior burns, or if they in semi natural areas. Ms. Ballard responded the answer is both, some are in natural stands and some are in previously treated areas.

Ms. Britting asked what Southern California Edison's role was in the area. Rich Bagley, Southern California Edison (SCE), commented that most of their area has been fire treated in the last twenty to thirty years. Ms. Ballard added that the FS has done joint projects with Southern California Edison. In response to a request, Mr. Bagley offered to provide information on this work.

- **ACTION ITEM:** Staff to work with Mr. Bagley to provide information about fire activity and treatments on SCE lands.

Craig Thomas, Sierra Forest Legacy, asked if any work has been done with increasing biodiversity. Ms. Ballard responded no, not within this district. Mr. Thomas added that would be good to include as part of the monitoring piece.

Mr. Bagley (via written notes) would like to see a map showing what areas are now, and what should be, pine forest within the Dinkey project area.

D. Roads Presentation by Andy Hosford

Mr. Hosford explained that while the demand for roads has increased with new users such as off-high vehicles (OHV), campers and hunters, the resources for operations and maintenance has decreased. He reviewed how the FS classifies roads within the forest, and the number of roads within the landscape, where they are, the intended use, and the surface type. He explained staff prepares an annual maintenance plan to prioritize work for the year, that includes projects within the Dinkey landscape classified as patching, oiling, rocking, balding, and brushing. He addressed the funding issues further and explained the creative funding measures they have worked to created such as OHV grants, Federal Stimulus Plan funding, as well as funding from Southern California Edison and PG&E who are required to maintain roads that go to their power lines and poles. Mr. Hosford explained working with the Collaborative would be another way to increasing funding for necessary projects.

He outlined his objectives and priorities including, repairing damage that is detrimental to the watershed, and sensitive soil areas. Road decommissioning is another priority.

Discussion:

Ms. Britting asked if staff work includes a prioritizing of roads for closure. Mr. Hosford responded yes. Tom Lowe, SNF, explained the difference in road closer and road decommission. The FS has only identified possible closures, which entails simply closing the gate and not allowing traffic to move through. Staff does see opportunities for decommissioning but they have not had the funding to move forward.

Mr. van Velsor commented that the next stage in travel management is to identify the minimum system which would include roads for decommissioning. Mr. Lowe agreed and added that action has to be done by 2015.

Mr. Hanson asked if FS staff has looked at the impacts of snags on existing roads and if the impacts of snags fit into the consideration of road closures and decommissioning. Mr. Lowe responded that it is a consideration, along with things like public safety.

Mr. Bagley (via written notes) asked what roads must be kept open for administration and or fire response within the Dinkey landscape. He also asked if there are any limits on the Collaborative's choice to decommission roads such as requirements to maintain recreation.

E. Botany Presentation by Jamie Tuitele-Lewis

Mr. Tuitele-Lewis reviewed maps of the landscape showing the general areas where habitat and vegetation species are located. He explained where endemic species are located such as carmentaria, noxious weeds, yellow star thistle, bull thistle, fox glove, spotted knapweed, and Spanish broom. He reviewed his priority needs in projects such as noxious weed control, habitat preservation and integrity, eliminate or minimize impacts such as OHV use, grazing, and alteration of hydrology. He reviewed the opportunities such as treatment control, minimizing impacts on habitat, fen assessments, more refined surveys in specific habitats for potential species, and research of data-poor species. He explained the FS does not have a lot of data, and that more data could be a great outcome of projects with the Collaborative. He reviewed his specific wish list for projects: continuing with the assessment of Nelson and Patterson mountains, early detection and rapid response crews for weed control, fine grained surveys for one suspected sensitive plant species and dedicated surveys in wet meadows and fens.

Discussion:

Ms. Britting asked if restoration activities approach the fens areas or wet meadows. Mr. Tuitele-Lewis responded yes, depending on what is impacting those areas. He explained large encroachment is a potential, another is any impacts in hydrology since they are groundwater fed. He will collaborate with watershed staff on those types of activities.

Mr. Thomas asked if there are plants known to be associated with fire. Mr. Tuitele-Lewis replied that there are some species known as fire followers, such as slender stem monkey flower. He explained this species tends to pop up after fires, but staff does not know enough about the species to know why.

Mr. Bagley (via written notes) asked what treatment opportunities (not studies) present themselves as a part of the Dinkey Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project.

F. Range Management Presentation by Amy Gustafson

Ms. Gustafson began by explaining the SNF has twenty-eight active grazing allotments and four permit holders on the Dinkey landscape. These grazing allotments start in the lowlands and move up as the season progresses. Ms. Gustafson reviewed the different standards for soil cover and stubble height as well as the long term monitoring goals. She explained the FS has 100 long term conditions and trend plots for the SNF and ten within the Dinkey landscape area. She reviewed the additional monitoring on best management practices, endangered species, proper functioning conditions and assessments. She outlined the opportunities, such as offsite water development; hardening crossings, meadow restoration, and exclosures. She summarized the priority needs including focusing on restoration efforts and problem areas identified in the past.

Discussion:

Mr. Bagley asked if staff conduct assessment for native species in lower elevation allotment areas. Ms. Gustafson explained that the whole system is considered converted so they manage for introduced species.

Pam Flick, Defenders of Wildlife, asked if grazing is allowed in the fen areas. Ms. Gustafson explained there are no exclosers on the fens; however, generally cattle do not like to go in fens.

Ms. Britting asked if burning for resource benefit is done in the oak wood areas. Previous speaker Ms. Ballard responded the FS has not done anything in those areas in over twenty-five years, primarily due to smoke damage, but staff is looking into doing some projects in those areas.

Ms. Britting followed up by asking if burning in regional grasslands would be a benefit to grazing. Ms. Gustafson responded potentially; however that is beyond her comfort zone. Ms. Ballard explained it is problematic because cattle have to be pulled off the land.

Mr. van Velsor asked if the goal is to keep cattle out of riparian areas and if so what is the best practice for doing so. Ms. Gustafson replied the FS has standards for use, but they do not try and keep them out as a whole. Mainly they use salting to encourage cattle to stay in certain areas.

Mr. Hanson asked if the FS uses fire to encourage getting native grasses back. Ms. Gustafson explained that seed sourcing or plugs would be necessary, and that fire alone would not accomplish that.

Mr. Fougères noted that an example landscape projects in Arizona provided by Mr. Thomas is included in the material packet for the Collaborative to review.

4. Proposal for the Addition of the Eastfork Project

Goal: Discuss possible addition of Eastfork project.

The presentation on Eastfork is a proposal in its initial stages; staff is looking for guidance and feedback. Staff wanted to check with Collaborative members to see this straw proposal resonates and if they are on the right track and should move forward. Mr. Jones-Yellin reviewed comments and concerns expressed by Collaborative members in past meetings, and with that feedback in mind, he and staff compiled this initial straw proposal for addressing some of those concerns. Mr. Fougères noted that the discussion will occur in two parts: first Mr. Jones-Yellin will review the substance of the project, and the in the next part of the agenda the Collaborative can discuss the overall timeline and work plan.

Mr. Jones-Yellin reviewed the project area and boundaries, defined by sub-drainages and restoration opportunities. He reviewed the management history and showed a map displaying past work done in the area, such as clear cuts, shelterwoods, sanitation and single tree, over story removal, as well as hazard removal. Next, he reviewed the existing vegetation: meadows, including lodgepole pine, subalpine, red fir, white fir and some barren areas; he noted that this does not take into account the planting that has been done since the clear cuts.

He reviewed the habitat known in the area, including critical aquatic refuge area and fisher habitat. He explained that there is a high probability of fisher activity in the very southern tip of

the project, since the project line follows the drainage. However, staff is not planning to treat that area and will honor the agreement about avoiding high probability fisher areas. He reviewed the protected activity centers, including those of the spotted owls.

Mr. Jones-Yellin summarized the fire history, explaining there have been six fires in this area; all were extinguished before they reached over six acres. Four of the fires were in the northern area.

He reviewed FS staff understanding of the Collaborative's interests as the following: reintroducing mixed-intensity fire, recruiting snags, developing ecologically appropriate forest structure, improving and avoiding terrestrial and aquatic habitat, minimizing road impacts, and managing for multiple benefits. He explained he included other members in staff to assist in the proposal development comments and encouraged staff to think about the concerns raised by this group.

Potential Management Actions

Mr. Jones-Yellin then transitioned into the potential management actions. As the area is far from areas the public access so they can consider **prescribed burns**. The burn window would be fall or late fall which then is right up on the next snow.

Other possible action is **stand thinning**, a consideration for spotted owl habitat. Lastly, **road maintenance** and **meadow restoration**.

He reviewed the high value areas. The first area is a stream crossing where water tends to backup behind the crossing and pool. This is having impacts on the meadow and species that both botany and aquatics are concerned about. The FS would like to look at this and alleviate the impacts fast. The second is a house meadow; the priority is to add an exclosure of the creek protecting it from the cattle, and to protect the bed stream.

Mr. Fougères reminded the group that this is not at the planning level yet, and that the Collaborative will be involved if they decide to move forward. He asked the each table consider the following question in their discussion.

Question: What are the key substantive recommendations and key concerns about this area as a proposal?

- Mr. Hanson began by expressing his encouragement by the discussion and the inclusion of prescribed fire. He would like to see more information on elevation and fire intensity correlation.
- Greg Schroer, SNF, asked what the desired outcome for vegetation in the short and long term.
- Another participant would like to know more about the management history of the area.
- Keith Ballard, SNF, suggested looking into road decommissioning, and determining the minimum system to maintain.
- Mr. Thomas explained his table group applied the "criteria for evaluating areas" discussed at the beginning of the meeting. They felt all but the hydrology criteria were met.

- Ms. Flick felt the project did not meet two of the evaluation criteria. She also noted smoke and air quality concerns. She suggested scheduling a field visit for the Collaborative members.
- Other members liked the idea of meadow restoration.
- Patrick Emmert, SCE, pointed out that older plantations within the area may have matured and should be thinned.
- Larry Duysen the importance of alleviating the hydrology problem occurring as the stream crossing backs up.
- Mr. van Velsor mentioned the need for keeping one road that goes over the meadow for future work, and that the sequencing of project activities should be done carefully.
- Alan Gallegos, SNF, noted that this project is at the same elevation as Teakettle Experimental Forest, and so the Collaborative should consider the work that has been done there to advance this site.
- Mr. van Velsor asked if there will be an analysis to see if fishers will be in the area in the future.
- Craig Thompson, USFS, responded that it is unlikely, although the FS would still run detector dogs through.
- Ms. Britting mentioned there have been ten fires in these units that have been suppressed which inferences can be drawn from. She asked what disturbance regime they would use.
 - Ms. Ballard responded that the FS can pull fire records dating back to the 1940s, as well as general weather history. She said these were lightning fires and yes if they were allowed to burn it would have made some changes on the landscape.

Next the group reviewed the schedule for the Collaborative's work from now until December 2011. The schedule includes landscape evaluation, ongoing project planning, joint fact finding, monitoring plan development and implementation. This schedule does not include the added work that would be necessary if the FS added Eastfork.

5. Review of the Schedule of Activities

Goal: Agree upon near-term schedule.

After considering the work already before the Collaborative, Mr. Fougères asked the group to discuss the following question.

- **Can you live with the front loading (of Soaproot and Eastfork) of this work for the summer; if not how would you modify this approach?**
- **In this context how do we manage the Eastfork work?**

Mr. Jones-Yellin briefly reviewed the draft Eastfork work plan and schedule. He asked for the group to consider this and provide some direction on whether it is feasible or not.

Mr. Gallegos, SNF, expressed his table's desire to go out to the field and visit the Eastfork area, and their concern that the timeline will not allow for that. His group suggested extending the timeline by approximately one month.

- Other members noted the snow level will make a field visit even more difficult.

The next table expressed the same concern about putting out proposed actions without having time to visit the area. This group suggested putting out an accurate but initial document for NEPA scoping, adequate for FS staff to begin analysis and for the public to provide meaningful comments, while still allowing more time for conducting work beyond the scoping notice. They discussed extending the scoping time to give assurance that the FS includes the Collaborative.

- Mr. Ray Porter, SNF, pointed out that the proposed action released during the NEPA scoping rarely ends up being the selected alternative, therefore the proposed action is something the FS definitely wants public input on. If the FS were to continue working with the Collaborative after a proposed action were made public, this proposed action would still have to be accurate and have enough detail for the public to be able to provide meaningful comments.
- Members stressed the importance of involving the Collaborative through the development of alternatives.
- Ms. Britting mentioned the Collaborative's Charter outlines the process as identified in the NEPA triangle. She noted that she was willing to treat Soaproot and Eastfork differently, but only if this were documented in the Charter, as the process would not be consistent with the NEPA triangle.

Members expressed the need to begin planning projects in advance to avoid this tight time frame in the future. They suggested starting to look at longer term projects now to get head start. Mr. Porter, SNF, noted that the Forest Service felt the same way, and wanted to begin identifying future projects now so that the Collaborative and Forest Service could work together from the start and not be rushed.

Mr. Hanson noted that he is okay with the front loading of the work. He also noted there is an opportunity for conducting research on black-backed woodpecker in the area, and he would be willing to lead a smaller group on a site visits to do some specific planning with the FS.

After the discussion Mr. Fougères went table-by-table and asked if any member of the Collaborative did not want to go forward with the project in this context. No members disagreed.

The group agreed to move ahead with the Soaproot and Eastfork projects on the condition that a “transition period” section were added to the Charter, which clearly identified the steps that differ from the standard NEPA process.

6. Charter Adoption

Since a “transition period” section would need to be added, and people had not had time to review changes made per the February meeting, the Collaborative agreed to postpone this agenda item until April, and to work offline to resolve any differences that may remain.

7. Proposal for the Clarence Unit Burn

Goal: Agree whether to advance this proposal, to be followed with a detailed presentation and opportunity for questions and recommendations.

Mr. Fougères explained that the next presentation is a quick check in with the group to see if members agree to the FS doing further work to develop project proposal. If the group agrees to advance the proposal, the facilitator will set up a webinar for members to get more details and information.

Mr. Thompson, USFS, reviewed the proposal and explained there is one female fisher known to be within the area of this prescribed burn. Within the current guidelines, therefore, this action would not be allowed. He explained the proposed steps to identify the fisher dens and then to set aside the standards and guidelines to allow for the FS to behave as if they did not know the den was there. Therefore allowing FS crew to be on the ground and monitor the animals during the prescribed burns. He explained the goal would be to move one animal at a time and to monitor and learn from the management and the behavior of the animal. He would like to do this during this denning period, one reason being that the female is wearing a collar so they know exactly where she is.

Mr. Hanson mentioned that having fires in March is not natural and he suggested it would be more useful to do this in June.

Mr. Bagley asked to hear more details on the plan and ability to move the animal and their families. Mr. Thompson explained since the female is collared the plan is to follow the animal and protect it as it moves.

Mr. Kangas noted he would like to have the opportunity to ask more detailed questions. Mr. Fougères noted that if the group agreed that staff should proceed in developing the proposal, this would be followed by a detailed webinar presentation and question & answer session.

Mr. Fougères asked the group within this context if they would be supportive of moving forward. No members objected.

The group agreed that the FS should continue to develop the fisher project proposal, to be followed by a dedicated webinar presentation and question and answer session.

Cindy Whelan, SNF, thanked members for their time and participation, and closed the meeting.

8. Attendance

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|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Elaine Alaniz, SNF | 4. Keith Ballard, SNF |
| 2. Richard Bagley | 5. Sue Britting |
| 3. Carolyn Ballard, SNF | 6. Kim Carr |

7. Dirk Charley, USFS
8. Charlotte Chorneau, CCP facilitation
9. Alan Gallegos, SNF
10. Kent Duysen
11. Larry Duysen
12. Patrick Emmert
13. Pamela Flick
14. Dorian Fougères, CCP facilitation
15. Julie Gott, SNF
16. Amy Gustafson, SNF
17. Chad Hanson
18. Steve Haze
19. Andy Hosford, SNF
20. Mosé Jones-Yellin, SNF
21. Rich Kangas
22. David Konno

23. Ray Laclergue
24. Tom Lowe, SNF
25. Steve Marsh, SNF
26. Ray Porter, SNF
27. Greg Schroer, SNF
28. Steven Shaw
29. Mark Smith
30. Kim Sorini-Wilson, SNF
31. Zach Tane, SNF
32. Craig Thomas
33. Craig Thompson, USFS
34. Jamie Tuitele-Lewis, SNF
35. Mandy Vance
36. Stan van Velsor
37. Cindy Whelan, SNF